

**Ellis, Alex**

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**From:** Ellis, Alex  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 13, 2021 10:22 AM  
**To:** letters@washpost.com  
**Subject:** Response letter from the Embassy of Bangladesh

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Greetings,

Please consider the below response letter from Ferdousi Shahriar, the Deputy Chief of Mission for the Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington D.C.

Re: [Bangladesh is supposed to be a host to the Rohingya refugees, not their jailer](#)

The government of Bangladesh appreciates Mr. Rahman's concern for the well-being of Rohingya refugees. We share that concern. But Mr. Rahman mischaracterizes Bangladesh's treatment of Rohingya refugees within its borders.

Bangladesh has worked diligently to protect the Rohingya who Myanmar violently ejected. To guarantee their safety, Bangladesh has deployed police to patrol the Rohingya camps, [constructed](#) a safe space for Rohingya women, [relocated](#) refugees to storm shelters during natural disasters, and [trained](#) volunteers, including Rohingya refugees, in disaster response.

Contrary to Mr. Rahman's claim, Rohingya leaders were thoroughly consulted on the Bhasan Char project to house the refugees. Rohingya representatives visited Bhasan Char to survey the facilities and make an informed choice about moving there. They all expressed satisfaction with facilities there, which includes solidly built homes.

More than \$350 million has been [invested](#) in Bhasan Char. It is [equipped](#) with hospitals, schools, playgrounds, grocery stores, and prayer houses. The island has two cellular towers for mobile services and facilities for detection and treatment of COVID-19. Everyone recognizes the refugee camps are not sustainable. Bhasan Char is part of a secure and voluntary accommodation in the meantime.

Mr. Rahman claims that Bangladesh lacks a national policy regarding the Rohingya. That is not so. The Rohingyas are Myanmar nationals and must return to Myanmar. The government of Bangladesh is doing its best to offer them safety and security. The international community including the United Nations should encourage Myanmar to begin repatriation, which is the only durable solution.

Sincerely,

Ferdousi Shahriar

Deputy Chief of Mission

Embassy of Bangladesh

Washington, D.C.

*This material is distributed by BGR Government Affairs, LLC on behalf of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Embassy. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*

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**Ellis, Alex**

---

**From:** Ellis, Alex  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 13, 2021 10:20 AM  
**To:** Kenneth.Roth@hrw.org; Siftonj@hrw.org  
**Subject:** Response letter from the Embassy of Bangladesh

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Dear Mr. Roth and Mr. Sifton,

Please consider the below response letter from Ferdousi Shahriar, the Deputy Chief of Mission for the Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington D.C.

In the recent article, "[Bangladesh: Hold Security Forces Accountable for Torture](#)," Human Rights Watch incorrectly suggests that Bangladeshi law enforcement officers operate with impunity. On the contrary, under the leadership of Prime Minister Hasina Bangladesh maintains a zero tolerance policy toward criminal actions committed by law enforcement officials. Bangladeshi law does not grant immunity to law enforcement.

Bangladesh also does not shy away from pursuing legal charges against members of law enforcement who break the law. When 35 law enforcement officials were found to be involved in the Narayanganj 7 murder case in 2014, Bangladesh brought charges against all of them. When three police officers were found negligent in their handling of a missing persons case, Bangladesh's Supreme Court in Petition No. 2833/2017 directed the Inspector General of Police to take the necessary action. Indeed, from 2013-2017, 258 charges were brought against members of law enforcement agencies.

The Bangladesh police have conducted themselves in accordance with international and domestic laws. As a signatory to the 1984 United Nations Convention Against Torture, and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Bangladesh has worked to ensure that its domestic laws are in line with its obligations under the Convention.

Contrary to your article, Mushtaq Ahmed was not abused in any way. When he fell ill, he was rushed to the hospital. Despite the government's efforts to help him, Mr. Ahmed was declared dead after being transferred to the medical college hospital. The government takes any death in custody seriously. After talking to jail mates and physicians and after looking at video footage, the government's primary conclusion is that Mr. Ahmed died of natural causes. That conclusion was supported by Mr. Ahmed's brother, a physician, who inspected the body and later told the media that there was no evidence of torture.

The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) is an elite unit of the Bangladesh police. It is under constant scrutiny and has undergone reforms. For example, with the help of the U.S. Department of Justice, an Internal Enquiry Cell (IEC) was formed under the RAB in January 2012. The Department of Justice's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) with the help of IEC has provided training to more than 90 officers. IEC is now responsible for investigating any allegations against RAB members in an unbiased manner.

The Government of Bangladesh is determined to abide by the rule of law. It oversees police and law enforcement authorities with this always in mind. Its actions are subject to scrutiny by the press and other interested parties. There is simply no way for the police to get away with kidnapping or killing people as has been alleged.

Sincerely,

Ferdousi Shahriar

Deputy Chief of Mission

Embassy of Bangladesh

Washington, D.C.

*This material is distributed by BGR Government Affairs, LLC on behalf of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Embassy. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.*

Alex Ellis

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**Ellis, Alex**

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**From:** Ellis, Alex  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 18, 2021 12:42 PM  
**To:** support@apnews.com; vdeepak@ap.org  
**Cc:** jalam@ap.org  
**Subject:** Response letter from the Embassy of Bangladesh

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Greetings,

Please consider the below response letter from Ferdousi Shahriar, the Deputy Chief of Mission for the Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington D.C.

The Human Rights Watch study that is the basis of the Associated Press article, "[UN urged to probe alleged disappearances in Bangladesh](#)," is built on questionable sources of information that in many instances should not be believed.

HRW's report is dependent on interviews with unidentified individuals, including 60 interviews with unnamed people, 81 citations from unnamed individuals, and 7 witnesses who are allowed to remain anonymous. While it takes seriously and investigates every reported disappearance, Bangladesh cannot, logistically or legally, give credence to anonymous sources that suggest law enforcement officials are abducting individuals in broad daylight when there is zero evidence – in arrest records or records of those detained – that corroborate those events.

HRW conflates what could be kidnapping with government-sponsored disappearances. The report cites 35 instances of individuals being abducted by men wearing plain clothes with no law enforcement identification. What makes HRW think these are police or government authorities rather than criminals? We are not told.

Human Rights Watch's reporting also relies on Odhikar, a Bangladesh-based human rights organization, which isn't credible. During a violent May 2013 protest by an extremist group, 11 people were killed, including police officers. Odhikar claimed 61 people were killed. The government asked Odhikar to provide names of those killed, but Odhikar was unable to. The group's report on the incident included doctored photos.

Nongovernmental organizations like HRW have repeated these kinds of unproven allegations for years against countries that are not yet wealthy and nonwhite. This kind of bigotry must stop.

Sincerely,

Ferdousi Shahriar

Deputy Chief of Mission

Embassy of Bangladesh

Washington, D.C.

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**Ellis, Alex**

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**From:** Ellis, Alex  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 19, 2021 9:22 AM  
**To:** Kenneth.Roth@hrw.org; Siftonj@hrw.org  
**Subject:** Response letter from the Embassy of Bangladesh

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Greetings,

Please consider the below response letter from Ferdousi Shahriar, the Deputy Chief of Mission for the Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington D.C.

The Human Rights Watch study [“‘Where No Sun Can Enter’: A Decade of Enforced Disappearances in Bangladesh,”](#) is built on questionable sources of information that in many instances should not be believed.

HRW’s report is dependent on interviews with unidentified individuals, including 60 interviews with unnamed people, 81 citations from unnamed individuals, and 7 witnesses who are allowed to remain anonymous. While it takes seriously and investigates every reported disappearance, Bangladesh cannot, logistically or legally, give credence to anonymous sources that suggest law enforcement officials are abducting individuals in broad daylight when there is zero evidence – in arrest records or records of those detained – that corroborate those events.

HRW conflates what could be kidnapping with government-sponsored disappearances. The report cites 35 instances of individuals being abducted by men wearing plain clothes with no law enforcement identification. What makes HRW think these are police or government authorities rather than criminals? We are not told.

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Nongovernmental organizations like HRW have repeated these kinds of unproven allegations for years against countries that are not yet wealthy and nonwhite. This kind of bigotry must stop.

Sincerely,

Ferdousi Shahriar  
Deputy Chief of Mission  
Embassy of Bangladesh  
Washington, D.C.

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**Ellis, Alex**

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**From:** Ellis, Alex  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 24, 2021 9:26 AM  
**To:** Shannon Tiezzi  
**Subject:** Response letter from the Embassy of Bangladesh

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Greetings,

Please consider the below response letter from Shah Alom Khokon the Counsellor (Political & Press) for the Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington D.C.

In "[Bangladesh's 'Fake News' Law Is Used to Stifle Dissent](#)," (Aug. 18) the author claims that Bangladesh is stifling the freedom of expression. This could not be further from the truth. Under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has fully embraced the free expression of its people. The Digital Security Act is an attempt to protect that right while also ensuring the safety of citizens.

This is a difficult balance to maintain. The Government of Bangladesh is obligated to protect citizens from blackmail, cyber bullying and digital extortion without doing harm to other rights. Journalists, editors and the editors' guild provided valuable advice that helped shape the Act. The result was a compromise and an understanding that the law would have to change as new technologies emerge and as authorities learn from experience how to enforce it. Nobody has yet been convicted under the Act.

Freedom of speech and expression are constitutionally guaranteed rights in Bangladesh. During the COVID-19 pandemic, human rights have remained at the center of Bangladesh's "whole of society approach" toward prevention, preparedness, containment, and treatment. The government's digital platforms have supported these efforts. Unfortunately, these same digital platforms have occasionally been abused by a few individuals to spread misinformation and to create fear, confusion, and division. People who have taken such irresponsible actions and who have run afoul of the law have been arrested.

Mushtaq Ahmed's arrest falls into this category. He was not abused in any way. When he fell ill, he was rushed to the hospital. Despite the government's efforts to help him, Mr. Ahmed was declared dead after being transferred to the medical college hospital. The government takes any death in custody seriously. After talking to jail mates and physicians and after looking at video footage, the government's primary conclusion is that Mr. Ahmed died of natural causes. That conclusion was supported by Mr. Ahmed's brother, a physician, who inspected the body and later told the media that there was no evidence of torture.

The author takes particular issue with Section 21 of the Digital Security act, which seeks to preserve the memory of the 3 million people who were killed during the genocide perpetrated during Bangladesh's War of Liberation. The provision is not unique to Bangladesh. Germany and 15 other European nations also have laws that prohibit the deliberate dissemination of misinformation about crimes against humanity. We wonder why the author and Amnesty International criticize countries like Bangladesh that are not yet wealthy and are nonwhite while ignoring the predominantly wealthy and white countries that also have this law.

Sincerely,

Shah Alom Khokon  
Counsellor (Political & Press)  
Embassy of Bangladesh  
Washington, D.C.

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**Ellis, Alex**

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**From:** Ellis, Alex  
**Sent:** Friday, October 29, 2021 9:31 AM  
**To:** EPhillips@voanews.com; editorials@voanews.com; voanews@voanews.com; SouthandCentralAsiainfo@voanews.com  
**Subject:** Response letter from the Embassy of Bangladesh  
  
**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Greetings,

Please consider the below response letter from Ferdousi Shahriar, the Deputy Chief of Mission for the Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington D.C.

Thank you.

Re: [Questions Surround UN Agency's Role in Bangladesh 'Prison-Island' for Rohingya Refugees](#)

The government of Bangladesh greatly appreciates Voice of America's ongoing concern for the wellbeing of Rohingya refugees. We have worked diligently to protect refugees taking temporary shelter in Bangladesh.

Contrary to Voice of America's reporting, however, Bhasan Char is not "unlivable". On the contrary, Bhasan Char is well protected from extreme weather, including cyclones. On Bhasan Char, water levels rise and fall seasonally and with storm activity, causing shorelines to retreat and extend a matter of feet. But the char never submerges. To guard against storm surges, the government has built earthen berms 8 feet high and 8 miles long around the facility.

More than \$350 million has been invested in Bhasan Char. It is equipped with hospitals, schools, playgrounds, grocery stores and prayer houses. The island has two cellular towers for mobile services and facilities for detection and treatment of the coronavirus. At the same time, everyone recognizes the refugee camps are not permanent. Bhasan Char is part of a secure, voluntary and temporary accommodation in the meantime.

Sincerely,

Ferdousi Shahriar

Deputy Chief of Mission

Embassy of Bangladesh

Washington, D.C.

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**Ellis, Alex**

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**From:** Ellis, Alex  
**Sent:** Monday, November 29, 2021 10:21 AM  
**To:** pitches@aljazeera.net; aje-newsdesk@aljazeera.net; news-room@aljazeera.net; press.int@aljazeera.net; BaysJ@aljazeera.net; salams@aljazeera.net  
**Subject:** Response letter from the Embassy of Bangladesh

Greetings,

Please consider the below response letter from Dewan Ali Ashraf, Minister (Political) for the Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington D.C.

Al Jazeera is wrong when it claims in its November 24 [article](#) that criminal charges against former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia are politically motivated. Zia was found guilty of embezzling funds from a children's orphanage trust. Other charges filed against her by the independent Anti-Corruption Commission relate to the riots in 2014 when her Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its collaborators set fire to thousands of homes, cars, buildings and businesses, demolished power stations and murdered 20 law enforcement officers.

Despite these charges, Khaleda Zia has been granted every right, comfort and protection legally available.

Al Jazeera is out of line when it suggests that Zia is a "victim of Prime Minister Hasina's 'personal vengeance'" and repeats the offensive, sexist trope, the "Battling Begums," meaning important women. Characterizing the rivalry between powerful political figures as a personal battle between two women smacks of colonial-era condescension. The media don't couch rivalries between male political figures using their gender. Isn't it time to stop this for women?

Sincerely,  
Dewan Ali Ashraf  
Minister (Political)  
Embassy of Bangladesh  
Washington, D.C.

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**Ellis, Alex**

---

**From:** Ellis, Alex  
**Sent:** Monday, November 29, 2021 10:24 AM  
**To:** Kenneth.Roth@hrw.org; Siftonj@hrw.org  
**Subject:** Response letter from the Embassy of Bangladesh

Dear Mr. Roth & Mr. Sifton,

Please consider the below response letter from Shah Alom Khokon the Counsellor (Political & Press) for the Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington D.C.

Human Rights Watch is wrong when it [claims](#) that Bangladesh has violated its agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in relocating Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char. HRW's charge is doubly perplexing because the agreement isn't public. How can it possibly know?

In any case, Bangladesh is not forcibly relocating refugees. Also, Bhasan Char is not "flood-prone," as HRW asserts. Water levels fluctuate seasonally and with storm activity, causing shorelines to retreat and extend a matter of feet. But the char never submerges. To guard against storm surges, the Bangladesh government has built earthen berms 8 feet high and 8 miles long around the facility.

The recent U.N. resolution, "The Situation of Human Rights of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar", demands that Myanmar's authorities address the root causes of the Rohingya crisis. We encourage Human Rights Watch to do the same. The Rohingya are Myanmar nationals. They must return to Myanmar. The government of Bangladesh is doing its best to offer them safety and security in the meantime. The international community must engage with Myanmar and compel it to commence repatriation.

Sincerely,

Shah Alom Khokon  
Counsellor (Political & Press)  
Embassy of Bangladesh  
Washington, D.C.

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